

St. Johns American Heritage River Navigator News

The St. Johns River
An American Heritage River

Volume 1, Issue 1



AHRI Steering Committee Meets

The second quarter 2002 AHRI Steering Committee meeting was held in Deland on May 23 at the Dixie Crossroads Restaurant. In attendance were over 30 people including County Commissioners, the Mayor of Jacksonville, agency representatives and private citizens.



Anne Keller, the new River Navigator who replaces Barbara Elkus, was introduced by Mayor Delaney. Keller, who accepted the position in March, provided a summary of the semi-annual AHRI meeting in NY, including options under discussion in

Washington, D.C. about the continuation of the AHRI under the new Bush administration. AHRI will likely be one of three efforts, along with Coastal America and the new Watershed Forum, overseen by the President's Council on Environmental Quality.

Hector Herrera of SJRWMD updated the group on the Upper Basin Restoration Project jointly conducted by the District and the USA-COE.

Videographers Tom Lowe and Alan Smith presented their ideas about filming a St. Johns AHR PBS video. A second group is also interested in making such a video, but have not presented their approach.

Background information on Coastal America, its projects and goals was provided by Bo Crum, EPA Region 4, with an emphasis on potential synergism between CA and AHRI that could provide more federal support for projects.

A status report on the Eco-Heritage Corridor website was given by Mike Brown of the North East Florida Regional Planning Council. A more user friendly structure was developed by the RPC after they sought input from the community.

Following the Steering Committee meeting, a group met to discuss how to organize a Riverwide Celebration for Spring 2003.

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Special points of interest:

- *How to contact the River Navigator—p. 4*
- *Want to help on the St. Johns American Heritage Initiative?*
- *Riverwide Celebration 2003—how can your group get involved?*
- *Need a speaker to talk with your group or students?*

Strategic Planning Workshop

In its third year of activity, the St. Johns AHRI has made tremendous progress toward achieving goals established in its original Workplan. Communities have been linked around a common interest in the river, the Eco-Heritage Corridor is

in development, and hundreds of acres of land have been purchased for preservation, through multi-agency cooperation.

The Steering Committee, at its May meeting, agreed it was time to develop a long

range strategic plan to continue progress on the AHRI for the next five to ten years.

A workshop is planned for August 16 to outline that plan for use at the upcoming River Summit 2003, and to help guide future activities.

Funding Sought/Received

The North East and East Central Regional Planning Councils each submitted project proposals to [FLA/USA](#). Funds from \$2,500 to \$3,500 for each project could support Eco-Heritage Corridor website enhancement and printing of a new Corridor brochure.

Discussions are underway between the Federal Highway Administration, Florida DOT and USEPA to explore mutual interests in supporting theme signage for the Eco-Heritage Corridor. FHWA and DOTs in other southeastern states have been leaders in providing funds to watershed groups for educational and

informational signs. The River Navigator is serving as the representative for the St. Johns in the initial stages of this effort. FHWA is an AHRI federal partner.

The Eco-Heritage Planning Committee for the St. Johns AHRI has expressed support for the development of a book, and possibly, a floating exhibit on art and artifacts of the St. Johns River. Bill Belville (writer), Gary



An alligator waits and watches for its next meal to come by

Monroe (DBCC photographer) and Mallory O'Connor (UF professor) will seek financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities with the assistance of the River Navigator. The trio hopes to secure a consultation grant from the NEH to fund the

development of their full proposal. NEH is especially interested in the river art idea because they are partners in the AHRI.

NOAA Premier Coastal Storms Initiative in St. Johns Estuary

Nine projects are underway in the Lower Basin of the St. Johns River, each a part of NOAA's new Coastal Storms Initiative (CSI) program to gather information that will improve predictive capacity and lessen the impacts of storms on coastal communities.

New bathymetric maps, a circulation model, improved collection of oceanic and meteorological data, better forecasting of ecological impacts such as sediment scouring, improved predictions of coastal flooding, a risk and vulnerability tool, and community out-

reach are some of the activities that are now underway. Each project has its own timeframe and contact, but Melissa Patterson, the outreach coordinator, will serve as the overall spokesperson for general questions.

Patterson indicated that NOAA chose the St. Johns to pilot the CSI in part because it is an American Heritage River, and in part because it is vulnerable to the impacts of storms. CSI is also a means for NOAA to improve cross-program interactions within NOAA itself. Collaboration and com-

"NOAA decided to begin its initiative in the St. Johns in part because of its designation as an AHRI river."

munity involvement are hallmark of the AHRI also. Many federal agencies are trying to enhance community and inter-agency involvement.

Eco-Heritage Corridor Planning Committee News

Sandra Glenn, Executive Director of the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council led the May 13 meeting of the Eco-Heritage Corridor Planning Committee in Deland.

Major topics of conversation were: the St. Johns River Art and Artifacts Exhibition, development of new subcommittees, a website update and how it ought to be managed for the long-term.

Four subcommittees were proposed to address various aspects of Corridor activities: marketing and public relations, events, river sites, and resources and education. Participants volunteered or were nominated for the committees which will report on their initial activities at the next meeting.

The North East RPC is currently responsible for website management, af-

ter its initial development through *gratis* work by Camp, Dresser and McKee. NERPC support will continue for another year.

The next Corridor meeting is Thursday



July 25 in Deland.

Heritage River Session at NE Florida Regional Environmental Summit—June 19

In response to an invitation from St. Johns County, several contributors to the St. Johns AHRI will speak at the annual regional summit at World Golf Village, June 19.

The “Heritage River” session will be one of three scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. Talks on: the AHRI, the Eco-Heritage Corridor, trails and greenways, and the natural side of the river will be presented by Anne Keller, River Navigator; Deena Wells, FDEP; Barbara Meyer, Brevard County; and Bill Bellville, author and naturalist.

Other sessions will highlight TMDLs,

land-use and water quality, wetland landbanks, environmental law enforcement, and boaters and manatees.

An opening general session, moderated by Brian Teeple of NEFRPC, will include overviews by Ernie Frey of FDEP, Jeff Elledge of SJRWMD, and Mark Evans and Raymond Wimbrough of USACOE, on their agencies’ plans related to the environment. Mayor John Delaney of Jacksonville will give

the lunch-time keynote speech.



St. Johns County Convention Center at Golf World

Annual meetings highlighting topics of regional significance have been held at the St. Johns County Convention Center for the past several years. Past topics include growth management, economic development, transportation, and water resources. The

meeting is open to anyone and free to the first 300 registrants.

Riverwide Celebration 2003

Plans are now being made for a Riverwide Celebration to be held in 2003. While various cities along the St. Johns have held river-related events for many years, only the clean-up extended along major stretches of the river simultaneously.

Following the May Steering Committee meeting, a dozen people from along the river brainstormed about establishing a series of activities that would take place during a week or ten days, all along the river next Spring.

We would like to have different emphases from location to location. For example, one area might hold a fishing tournament, another a canoeing event, and a third an art and nature festival.

The Detroit, Potomac, Blackstone and other American Heritage Rivers hold special celebrations annually.

The idea is to better connect communities with the river. If you are a birding enthusiast, a canoeist, a biker, a fisher, a storyteller, a musician, an artist, an outfitter or have another interest in the

The idea is to better connect communities with the river.

St. Johns River, please get involved. Contact Deena Wells at 904-807-3210 or Anne Keller, River Navigator at 561-818-6119

Get Involved, Join In, Help Us

The American Heritage Rivers Initiative is a community-based effort to improve, protect and provide appropriate economic development along rivers in our country. Because each river was selected for designation following a local request and proposal, projects that are undertaken are locally-driven.

Basin committees need participants, ideas and energy. Each Basin Advisory

Committee identifies its own environmental, economic, cultural or historical projects to be completed as part of the St. Johns AHRI Strategic Plan.

To get involved, contact: Brevard County Commissioner Sue Carlson (Vero Beach to Lake Washington) at 321-633-2044, Volusia County Councilwoman Pat Northey (Lake Washington to Crescent Lake) at 386-736-5920 or



A Great Egret on the shore of the St. Johns River.

Putnam County Commissioner Nancy Harris (Crescent Lake north to Jacksonville) at 386-698-2776.

You may also contact Anne Keller, River Navigator, at 561-818-6119.

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The St. Johns River was designated as an American Heritage River by the President in 1998. Local, State and Federal groups signed an agreement on cooperation following that designation, and the first River Navigator was selected in 1999.

The St. Johns AHR is focused on protecting cultural/heritage sites, improving water quality, and on developing economic opportunities along the river.

Three Basin Advisory Committees are comprised of local citizens and elected officials who then represent their area on the Steering Committee, chaired by Mayor John Delaney of Jacksonville, the early proponent of the designation.



Speakers Available, River Navigator Information

A number of people who are actively involved in the St. Johns American Heritage River Initiative are available to speak to nature groups, tourist development or chamber of commerce meetings, students or other gatherings where community topics are discussed.

We have naturalists, cultural and heritage experts, folks involved with greenways and trails, water quality experts and writers who would be happy to talk with you about the AHRI, the St. Johns River and many other subjects. Please contact the River Navigator or your Basin Advisory Committee chairs (See "Get Involved, Join In" above, p. 3) for more information.

The new River Navigator for the St. Johns is Anne Keller. She lived in the

Gainesville area for 15 years while completing her doctorate at the University of Florida in aquatic toxicology and working for the St. Johns River Water Management District. Later, Keller was a research scientist for the USFWS/USGS, then accepted a position with the USEPA in Athens, Georgia.

The River Navigator is available to assist communities in working their way through government bureaucracy to find the funding or other resources they need to complete projects. She is also the liaison between the federal government and the Steering Committee.

Having been a resident of the area for many years, Dr. Keller has personal interest in the river and knowledge of many issues of concern in the region. Her office will be in the Prudential Building starting in early July. Until

then, she can be reached by cell phone at 561-818-6119.



Jacksonville is at the lower end of the St. Johns River—it flows north

Federal partners in the AHRI include the USFWS, the Federal Highway Administration, the National Endowment for the Humanities, EPA and the COE. The FDEP and SJRWMD are state partners.